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Viewing cable 09NICOSIA272, CYPRUS: SCENESETTER FOR FM KYPRIANOU'S APRIL 20

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09NICOSIA272	2009-04-16 14:01	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Nicosia

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000272

SIPDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/14/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNFICYP](#) [CY](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: CYPRUS: SCENESETTER FOR FM KYPRIANOU'S APRIL 20 VISIT

REF: NICOSIA 266

Classified By: Ambassador Frank C. Urbancic, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Your April 20 meeting with Republic of

Cyprus Foreign Minister Markos Kyprianou will demonstrate continued high-level U.S. support for reunification negotiations. You will want to note that the international community has high expectations for these talks and that the status quo on the island cannot continue. UN envoy Alexander Downer recently argued "it is time to inject some uncertainty in Greek Cypriots' minds that this cannot go on forever." We ought to press Kyprianou on the RoC's unhelpful foreign policy turns; under President Demetris Christofias, Cyprus has sought to warm relations with Havana, Caracas, Tehran, Moscow, and Damascus. Last, you might want to raise our continued interest in the cargo of the M/V Monchegorsk, a Russian-owned, Cypriot-flagged freighter carrying arms from Iran to Syria in contravention of UN resolutions. Cyprus eventually ordered the ship to port and confiscated the cargo, but has yet to answer the UN Sanctions Committee's request for details on cargo ownership. END SUMMARY.

Tense Atmospherics in the Run-up to Your Meeting

12. (C) You last saw Markos Kyprianou in Prague, on the margins of the April 5 U.S.-EU summit. The Cypriot FM pushed for increased pressure on Turkey to support the settlement talks. A "new start in bilateral relations with the new U.S. administration" was also on his mind, in the form of more frequent political-level dialogue, greater U.S. support for Christofias, more "gestures" toward the Greek Cypriot (G/C) side, and a policy of "no surprises." Kyprianou's chief of staff angrily cited that "no surprises" clause upon learning you intended to receive Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat on April 15. The Ambassador sought to re-engage Kyprianou regarding his visit before the FM's departure for Washington, but before a meeting could be arranged, the Minister traveled to New York for meetings with Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and other UN officials.

13. (C) A degree of "visit neuralgia" now grips the Greek Cypriot community, spurring fears in this zero-sum region that U.S. efforts to strengthen relations with Ankara somehow downgraded our dealings with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus. It reached fever pitch during the President's two-day visit to Turkey, but actually began with your own March 7 joint statement with Turkish FM Ali Babacan. Your pull-aside with Kyprianou in Prague lowered temperatures temporarily, but they have jumped again. You can expect Kyprianou to voice his displeasure over the April 15 Talat visit, perhaps even complaining about having learned about it from the media (the truth is that the T/C leader immediately contacted President Christofias with the news, before anyone released it publicly.)

Relations with Cyprus: "The Problem," and a Whole Lot More

14. (C) During his 30-minute call on you April 20, Kyprianou will want to focus on efforts to resolve the Cyprus question. We are supporting the talks from the sidelines, urging flexibility from the parties plus Turkey and Greece, coordinating messages with our P-5 partners both locally and in New York, discreetly funding substantive experts advising the UN team, and promoting enactment of confidence-building measures to improve the negotiating climate.

15. (C) President Christofias is invested heavily in getting a deal -- some say he has staked his legacy on it. History shows, however, that G/C leaders lose little electorally by taking hard lines in the talks. Christofias will not walk away from the table; the risk is that the talks could die slowly, with G/Cs citing Turkish and T/C "intransigence" as the cause. To counter this, UN envoy Downer has adopted an "inject some uncertainty" stance, publicly underlining the negative outcomes for both sides if pro-solution leaders Christofias and Talat do not reach agreement. Such consequences could include changes to the UN Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) mandate or force level. We should support Downer

in this campaign by underscoring to Kyprianou and other G/C leaders that now is the time to do a deal. Hard compromises will be required from both sides, and the leaders have a special responsibility to educate and lobby their respective rank-and-file to support the process and an eventual deal.

¶16. (C) A caveat is in order. Negotiations to resolve the Cyprus Problem take place in a community-to-community framework, with the Republic of Cyprus president representing Greek Cypriots and, since the 1983 declaration of the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus," the "TRNC president" representing Turkish Cypriots. As such, the RoC FM does not take active part in the bi-communal discussions. Even so, Kyprianou has influence, and he attempts to shape debate in meetings of the Council of Ministers, formally the RoC executive branch's highest deliberative body. In Brussels and with fellow EU foreign ministers, he constantly lobbies for tougher European positions vis-a-vis Ankara. In Cypriot eyes -- and amongst many Europeans hostile to Ankara joining the Union -- Turkish EU accession is dependent on moves to normalize Turkey-Cyprus relations. Here Kyprianou has taken a strong stance against the opening of further Acquis negotiating chapters until Turkey extends its Customs Union agreement to Nicosia, opens its ports and airports to Cypriot craft, and drops its opposition to Cypriot membership in international organizations of which Ankara is already a member.

A Ledger That's Unfortunately Tilting Red

¶17. (C) In regional and multilateral fora, there are positives to report. Just three days ago, President Christofias personally approved our request for landing privileges for the aircraft carrying the lone surviving Somali gunman from the Maersk Alabama hijacking. He voiced a commitment to work with the U.S. and others to fight seaborne piracy. The government in March ordered the deportation to Greece of a terrorist wanted by Turkey, fully aware that Ankara would seek extradition from Athens. Both are worthy of your mention to Kyprianou.

¶18. (C) Our desire for a better relationship with Cyprus is firm. Since Christofias's election in February 2008, however, we have witnessed an ideologically-motivated attempt to turn back the clock to the heydays of the Non-Aligned Movement. He has publicly praised Fidel Castro, welcomed a new Venezuelan Embassy in Nicosia, lauded Iran, and vilified NATO and the Partnership for Peace (PfP). Christofias's commitment to Russian President Dimitri Medvedev to promote the latter's European security proposal within the EU seems gratuitous, and his outreach to Hugo Chavez and Venezuela strikes us as an intentional move to distance his government from the United States. While the questionable policy shift is the president's making, you should call Kyprianou on it, urging him to use the new and/or upgraded relations with rogue states to demand better behavior and improvements in their abysmal human rights records.

¶19. (C) Cyprus's new direction under Christofias has made final resolution of the M/V Monchegorsk incident problematic. Acting on reliable information, U.S. naval forces in January boarded the Russian-owned, Cypriot-flagged Monchegorsk, finding cargo and documents indicating it was carrying arms from Iran to Syria in contravention of UN resolutions. Only a full-court international press from the UN Security Council and EU convinced Cyprus to summon the vessel to port for a more-thorough inspection and eventual seizure of the cargo. Subsequent RoC cooperation with the UN's Iran Sanctions Committee (ISC) has been half-hearted; we therefore recommend that you question Kyprianou regarding the UN request for Cyprus to share information on cargo ownership.

What's Topping His To-Do List?

¶10. (C) Upon departing for the United States on April 15, the Cypriot Foreign Minister repeated his mantra that the U.S. Government should pressure Turkey regarding a Cyprus settlement. Kyprianou has not specified what he would have us press Ankara to do, however. Our view, shared by the UN's Downer, is that Turkey mainly is observing the talks at this point, not directing them. You might push Kyprianou for concrete actions the international community might take with Ankara to spur greater Cyprus Problem movement.

¶11. (C) He will get specific on two closely-related matters, however. Part and parcel of its non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus, Ankara regularly opposes Cypriot membership in international bodies in which the GoT already sits, from the Wassenaar Arrangement and Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) to the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT). Of greatest recent interest to Nicosia has been a spot in the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), since Cyprus maintains the world's eleventh-largest merchant fleet. Both in Washington and on the island, Cyprus has sought our support in its bid to join, and Kyprianou may push as well; our general policy is to support Cypriot membership in entities that are global and inclusive in nature. Turkey, which has contributed a ship and helicopter, opposes Cypriot participation in the CGPCS unless all UN states are admitted. The FM may also raise 'Turkish naval vessels' recent harassment of Cypriot-contracted research vessels conducting natural gas and petroleum exploration off the island's southern coast. The RoC has responded by blocking the opening of the EU Acquis energy chapter in Brussels. We have been urging moderation and restraint on both sides.

Who He Is

¶12. (C) Son of former Republic of Cyprus President Spyros Kyprianou, the Cypriot FM was educated at all the right schools, including Cambridge and Harvard, and was groomed from an early age for politics. His name recognition here is such that pundits refer to him only as "Markos," a la Elvis or Madonna. Most Cypriots believe he will eventually become president, and both AKEL (far left) and DISY (right-center) approached him in 2007 to be a joint (but formally non-aligned) candidate to challenge then-President Tassos Papadopoulos. Kyprianou demurred, mainly because Papadopoulos and he belong to the same DIKO party, albeit from different factions. Once Papadopoulos failed to advance to the second round of elections in February 2008, AKEL's Christofias sought and obtained DIKO's support, acceding to the latter party's demand to name Kyprianou foreign minister if he emerged victorious. Christofias won the race and brought the DIKO man into his cabinet.

¶13. (C) The relationship between the Cypriot president and his FM is icy by all accounts. Their Cyprus Problem philosophies are miles apart, for example, with Kyprianou much more the hard-liner. Personally, the small-townish, USSR-educated, and far-from-eloquent Christofias feels a bit diminutive next to his aristocratic minister. The president has responded by isolating Kyprianou from the talks and minimizing his influence by seeking greater powers for the Presidential Diplomatic Office, staffed by more trusted confidants. On the Monchegorsk incident and dealings with Syria, as well as on relations with Havana and Caracas, it is clear that the Christofias Palace, not the Kyprianou MFA, is clearly at the helm.
Urbancic